

not to be missed this month

DECEMBER 1 - JANUARY 30

Phone Book Recycling Drop Off,
Blacksburg Recreation Center
and Blacksburg Library

DECEMBER 2

Downtown Festivities
and Annual Holiday Parade
4:00-8:00pm

DECEMBER 5

Brush Collection Begins
in the Northeast

2nd Half of Real Estate
Tax Payments Due

DECEMBER 6

Town Council Work Session,
11:00 am

Planning Commission Meeting,
7:30 pm

DECEMBER 10-11

Holiday Craft Show and
Pictures with Santa at the
Community Center

DECEMBER 12

Brush Collection Begins
in the Northwest

DECEMBER 13

Town Council Meeting, 7:30 pm

DECEMBER 19

Brush Collection Begins
in the Southwest

DECEMBER 20

Town Council Work Session,
11:00 am

DECEMBER 23

Town Offices Closed
for the Holidays
Trash Collection on Schedule

DECEMBER 26

Town Offices Closed
for the Holidays
Trash Collection in Southwest
on Schedule

DECEMBER 27

Town Council Meeting Cancelled

DECEMBER 31

County Dog Tags Expire
Community Center and
Klipps Gym Closed



in this issue

Preserving Odd Fellows Hall.....	2
VDOT Awards Transportation Funding	3
Strategic Planning Efforts.....	4
Message from the Manager	5
Building Homes, Building Communities.....	5
About Town Says it All.....	6
Time for a Cattle Call.....	6

about town

newsletter of the town of blacksburg www.blacksburg.gov • dec 2005

Middle School Youths Learn Value of Neighborhoods at Statewide Conference

BMS Students Attend Virginia State Neighborhood Conference for Second Year

Whether you are cognizant of it or not, you live in a neighborhood. No big deal, right? Well, for the past six years, the Virginia State Neighborhood Conference has been facilitating networking and fostering trade opportunities between Neighborhood Associations

across the state. The annual conference, held September 22-24th in Norfolk provided the opportunity for community leaders to discuss issues currently facing neighborhoods, listen to thought-provoking speakers, attend workshops to enhance their neighborhood's performance and for the second year, the conference also provided a chance for Blacksburg youth to participate. The students were able to attend the conference

because of generous support from Blacksburg Middle School, middle school families, and the Jr. Women's League of Blacksburg who paid the registration fees. Blacksburg's Neighborhood Enhancement Services division covered transportation and lodging, and the parents paid for meals. All who contributed feel that this was a worthy investment, and that over time the return on investment will continue to grow.

— continued on page 4



BLACKSBURG PARTNERSHIP TO RELEASE FLOCK OF HOKIE BIRDS

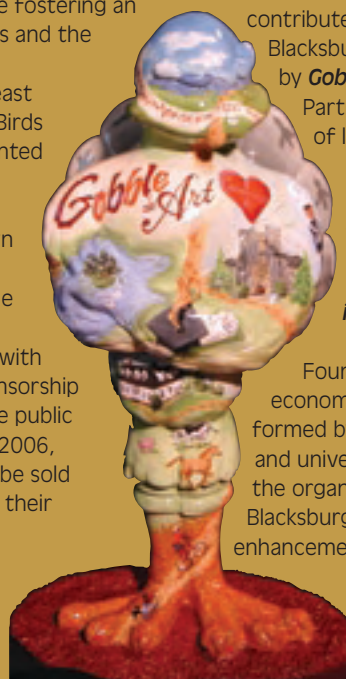
The Blacksburg Partnership Foundation presented plans to Blacksburg Town Council in September for a one of a kind public art project called *Gobble de Art*. *Gobble de Art* is an endeavor designed to increase interest in and awareness of Blacksburg, while fostering an appreciation for the visual arts and the surrounding art community.

The project includes at least seventy-five fiberglass Hokie Birds that will be decorated and painted by regional artists and Virginia Tech art alumni, and then displayed throughout the Town of Blacksburg. Businesses or individuals may sponsor a Hokie Bird for a \$2500 donation or secure permanent ownership with a donation of \$7500. The sponsorship will run for the duration of the public exhibit, July 2006 to October 2006, at which time the statues will be sold at auction and then moved to their permanent destinations.

Community art projects such as *Gobble de Art* have gained great notoriety around the country, including such campaigns as *Horse Fever* in Lexington, Kentucky; *We Let the Dogs Out* in Athens Georgia; and *The Big Pig Gig* in Cincinnati, Ohio. *Gobble de Art* is a great opportunity for Hokie fans and art enthusiasts to show their support for Virginia Tech, and contribute to the long term vitality of the Blacksburg community. Proceeds generated by *Gobble de Art* will fund the Blacksburg Partnership's efforts to enhance quality of life in Blacksburg.

For more information on the project and to download sponsorship and call to artist materials visit www.gobbledeart.org, contact Diane Akers at (540) 443-2008, or email info@gobbledeart.org.

The Blacksburg Partnership Foundation is a non-profit, independent economic development organization formed by the Town of Blacksburg, business and university communities. The purpose of the organization is to bolster the vitality of Blacksburg by promoting the quality of life and enhancement of full service retail districts.



Preserving Our History: The Odd Fellows Hall

A boarded up ticket window; worn steps rising to a modest stage, and a black wooden coffin are a few of the secrets the Odd Fellows Hall shares with its visitors. Built in 1905, this dignified structure stands as one of only two buildings left from New Town, an African-American community in Blacksburg that thrived until the late 1960s. The original electrical system, plaster walls, and worn floorboards provide a glimpse of life in New Town in the early twentieth century. With the help of former New Town residents and dedicated citizens, the Town of Blacksburg is working to restore this historic building and create a museum preserving the significant contributions of African-Americans to our town.

Over one hundred years ago, on March 28, 1905, six members of the Tadmore Light Lodge 6184 of the Grand United Order of the Odd Fellows gathered to discuss the purchase of a small lot on the corner of Gilbert and Barger Streets. The members formed a joint stock company with the Saint Francis Council of the Right and Worthy Grand Council of the Independent Order of St. Luke to purchase the land and build a meeting hall. These benevolent organizations worked diligently to provide mutual aid to African-Americans at a time when segregation prevented them from enjoying the rights of their white neighbors. The newly constructed hall served as their meeting place and quickly became a community gathering place for New Town residents and African-Americans throughout the area.

The dual function of the Odd Fellows Hall as social center and meeting place is evident in its architecture. The two story wood frame



withholding the secrets of other sacred ceremonies. Members of Saint Luke's also fondly remember their meetings in the hall. Beatrice Walker, a former member, presents her life insurance policy issued by her organization as evidence of its significant contribution to the community.

When desegregation came to Blacksburg in the late 1960s, the Odd Fellows Hall was largely abandoned, and as Blacksburg prospered, citizens developed a commitment to preserving the building. In September of 2004, when no legal owner could be found, Montgomery County Judge Ray Grubbs appointed three trustees, Beatrice Walker, Aubrey Mills, and Walter Lewis to oversee the hall. The trustees offered to donate the building to the Town of Blacksburg under the conditions that it receive state and national historic designations, and that it be restored and dedicated to collecting, preserving, and presenting the history of African-Americans in Blacksburg. Town Council enthusiastically accepted this offer and appointed a sub-committee of the Blacksburg Museum Committee to oversee the affairs of the hall.

In the summer of 2005, the Odd Fellows Hall was placed on the Virginia Landmarks Register and the National Register of Historic Places, and donated to the Town of Blacksburg. In striving to restore the Odd Fellows Hall, Blacksburg celebrates the shared history of our town; comprised of the experiences and contributions of the diverse people who have lived and worked here.

building consists of two large open rooms, one on top of the other. The first floor hosted numerous social events including bingo parties, dances, and fashion shows. A stage at the east end elevated musicians above the crowds filling the dance floor and spilling into Gilbert Street.

In the northwest corner a narrow staircase leads to the second floor, accessible only to members of the Odd Fellows and Saint Luke's. Here these organizations performed sacred rituals and met to discuss the needs and desires of their community. Three altars bearing the insignia of the Odd Fellows are among the few remaining ceremonial objects, while a tall black coffin rests mysteriously in the corner



THIS YEAR, the Virginia Department of Transportation offered up to \$1 million in state highway funding to localities that applied and could match VDOT funds with their own transportation project funds. 2005 is the first year VDOT extended its funding program to allow towns and cities, in addition to counties, the opportunity to apply for the Revenue Sharing Program.

Kelly Mattingly, Blacksburg Director of Public Works, submitted the application this past July. In August, VDOT notified the Town that requests for funding under the program exceeded available funds. As a result, each locality received a portion of their original request. The Town was awarded \$744,920. Including the town match, approximately \$1.5 million is now available for transportation related improvements. Town funds for the program came from earmarked transportation moneys in the Capital Improvement Program.

VDOT placed several restrictions on participating localities. For instance, the Town cannot spend any funds before projects are approved and are not permitted to count the VDOT funding toward annual highway maintenance funding.

"The Town of Blacksburg typically allocates between \$100,000 to \$200,000 for transportation improvement projects in a typical fiscal year," said Planning and Engineering Director, Adele Schirmer. "The Expanded Revenue Sharing Program will now allow us to make a number of improvements that will not only aid motorist and pedestrian traffic and safety, but impact the beauty and aesthetic qualities of the Town."

Town Council identified and approved the projects included in the proposal and designated the priority of each project. The top ten priority projects received funding.

The first and most costly project involves improving the South Main Street streetscape from Roanoke Street to Eheart. The streetscape, or landscape of the street, involves the installation of brick sidewalks, street lamps, trees, and benches carrying the motif that was recently completed from College Avenue to Roanoke Street. Schirmer says that the Town would like to continue the Main Street streetscape

Blacksburg moves ahead with help from VDOT

as far as funding will allow in the future.

Part of the Huckleberry Trail overlaps with a farm road on the Virginia Tech campus. Funding will allow an overpass to be built, allowing pedestrians to travel over vehicular traffic rather than share the same road. The ending result will be increased safety for both trail users and vehicle operators.

Adjacent to **A Cleaner World** and directly across from **Wendy's** on South Main Street, is King Street which, through VDOT funding, will be extended to connect to Hubbard Street, allowing motorists to access Main Street more safely. The road will be extended approximately 100 feet and allow drivers to approach Main Street at a traffic light.

The VDOT funding will also allow for town wide storm drain improvements. Schirmer says that the project will involve "small, localized improvements" many of which will occur in neighborhoods.

Opticom transmitters, which interrupt traffic signals to allow emergency vehicles the throughway, will be installed on several main roads.

On North Main Street, a pedestrian crosswalk and sign will be installed.

Sidewalks are also a priority for the Town. This program will allow for sidewalk construction on sections of Airport Road and the east side of University City Boulevard, opposite University Mall. On the west side of the Boulevard the mall developer will be responsible for extending the sidewalk.

While VDOT granted funding for ten projects, five of the proposed projects did not make the cut. These include a Huckleberry Trail connector and extension, Broce Drive Sidewalk Extension, North Main/Progress Street signal replacement and some landscape maintenance throughout town. Although these projects were not funded, they will be considered again in future applications.

This funding partnership will enable the Town to address a number of significant transportation needs that have been requested by our citizens and will benefit the entire community. The goal is for VDOT-funded projects to be contracted or completed by July of 2006.



About Town is a publication of the Town of Blacksburg Community Relations Office. Also available online at: www.blacksburg.gov/e_news.php

mission of the town of blacksburg
To support a dynamic community by providing effective municipal services and enhancing Blacksburg's quality of life.

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BLACKSBURG INITIATES STRATEGIC PLANNING EFFORTS

Strategic Planning is a dynamic process, and there are few towns as dynamic as Blacksburg, Virginia.

The Town of Blacksburg is beginning a Strategic Planning initiative to identify and address the major issues we expect to face over the next five years. The plan is directly tied to the vision, mission and core values of our town government. The next step is to develop a set of organization wide goals to move us toward achieving our vision, while adhering to our mission and values.

The Town Council, Executive and Leadership Teams are leading the efforts to develop this plan with input from all Town of Blacksburg employees. The plan will be coordinated with the 2006 update of the Comprehensive Plan as an overall process to gain public input.

The Strategic Plan is not a rigid blueprint, but a flexible and dynamic document which the Town will use to

Blacksburg Mission

**To support a
dynamic community
by providing effective
municipal services and
enhancing Blacksburg's
quality of life.**

Blacksburg Values

**Integrity
Open Government
Community Pride
Citizen Involvement
Customer Service
Public Safety
Leadership
Innovation
Fiscal Responsibility**

implement priorities over the next 5-years. The plan will serve as an internal organization document guiding each department through action strategies that are tied to the common vision and goals of the town. The action strategies component of the Strategic Planning process will be directly tied to the available human and capital resources within the organization. The integration of action strategies and available resources will provide a stronger foundation for decision making and measuring effectiveness of town services.

Planning efforts are underway and will continue through the next eight months. The final plan will lead the Town in budgeting, service delivery, and projects beginning in July of 2006.

Any questions or comments about the Strategic Plan should be directed to Chris Lawrence, Assistant to the Town Manager at (540) 961-1130 or clawrence@blacksburg.gov.

— continued from page 1

The youth initiative began several years ago when Neighborhood Services Coordinator Kim Kirk noticed other communities bringing youth to the conferences and integrating them into the sessions. Since then, the practice of providing an opportunity for youth to participate has expanded with other communities bringing groups as well. Last year Blacksburg hosted the conference, and Kirk decided to capitalize on the opportunity by inviting a select group of Blacksburg Middle School and Virginia Tech students to attend the conference. The students were active in workshops including Housing and Urban Development, and the Nuts and Bolts of Neighborhoods, and were able to make connections with other youth from across the commonwealth. The success of the 2004 conference, along with the passage of Virginia State General Assembly's House Bill 1769 Commission on Civics Education led to not only the inclusion of students in this year's conference, but the opportunity to build off the foundation of what they learned

at the conference and with Blacksburg Middle School social studies teachers Beth Levinson and Donna Logan who are developing a neighborhood civics unit for their 8th grade students.

"My objectives for this initiative are teaching the students how to become active citizens and familiar with the structure of their local governments (Blacksburg and Montgomery County) as part of our system of federalism." We also want them to realize their opinions are important, that they are in fact citizens of Blacksburg and their voices need to be heard," said Levinson. To meet these goals and to prepare students for the Standards of Learning exams (SOL), Levinson and Logan have asked their students to propose changes that positively impact the Town of Blacksburg from their perspective, and then work through the system to attempt to see those changes made. "I wanted them to learn that the local government is the government that is closest to them and I wanted them to know the different departments and the process of getting to

know who to contact for certain issues," said Levinson, noting that this project was still very much a work in progress. Eventually, Levinson hopes to involve the students in a mock Town Council meeting "so the kids can learn how to really articulate ideas in that type of setting." She also notes that the inclusion of students in the Neighborhood Conference was an excellent experience that helped to get students more involved in the curriculum.

Kirk says she hopes that Blacksburg youth can take on a more prominent role in future conferences by heading up workshops and panel discussions to showcase their hard work, both in and out of the classroom.

Next year's neighborhood conference will be held in Danville, Virginia. Plans to bring students are already under way.

FROM THE TOWN MANAGER

Dear Blacksburg Citizens:

Since I began my new role as Blacksburg's Town Manager a few months ago, I have received many questions from citizens. One interesting question that I have been asked is "What is a Town Manager?" Simply put, a Town Manager is the chief administrative official in a locality that has adopted the council-manager form of government. In the council-manager form of government, political and policy leadership is the responsibility of an elected council. The

council hires a professional local government manager to oversee the delivery of public services.

As the manager, I serve as the council's chief advisor and carry out the Town's administrative responsibilities such as preparing the annual budget, recruiting, hiring, and supervising the staff and implementing the council's policies and running the day-to-day operations of the Town government. It is my responsibility to provide the council with complete and objective

information, the pros and cons of alternatives, and long-term benefits and consequences of policy choices.

The Town Council focuses on community goals, major projects, approves the budget, sets tax rates, and adopts all local ordinances. The Council approves long range plans such as the comprehensive plan and capital improvement program and sets major policies dealing with land use, development, utilities, and transportation.

The Council-Manager form of government was born in Staunton, Virginia in 1908 and is now the most popular form of government in the United States in communities with populations of 5,000 or more. The Town of Blacksburg adopted the council-manager form and hired its first Town Manager in 1952. I am excited about the opportunity to serve as Blacksburg's tenth Town Manager and to continue to serve the citizens, staff and council of Blacksburg.

Sincerely,

Marc A. Verniel

Affordable Housing Opportunities: Building Homes, Building Communities

All over the country, affordable housing is getting harder and harder to find and "starter homes" are virtually nonexistent. Families and individuals in the low to middle income bracket are finding it extremely difficult to buy their own homes or rehabilitate existing homes because of the cost of materials and labor. Home ownership is part of the American Dream and a home means much more than shelter from the elements. To many people, a home means security, permanence, hope for the future, and a sense of belonging.

Blacksburg's Interim Housing and Community Development Manager, Matt Hanratty, says that several Town initiatives will help combat the effects of rising housing prices, and rent and maintenance costs for Blacksburg residents.

Two new initiatives under the Housing and Community Development office have been designed to rehabilitate older homes. These include the **Owner Rehabilitation Program** and the **Owner/Investor Rehabilitation Program** for those who lease their property. These programs are structured not for the purpose of

home renovation but more fittingly for rehabilitation of homes that are in disrepair.

The cost of the Owner Rehabilitation Program will be forgiven if the property owner establishes residence in the home for 10 years or more. For the Owner/Investor, the loan will be forgiven if the property is leased to low to moderate income tenants for the same period of time.

One Blacksburg resident who applied and qualified for the Owner Rehabilitation program was Faith Christian. A housing rehabilitation specialist inspected Ms. Christian's house and found that the foundation was crumbling under much of the structure. Rather than attempt to build a new foundation, it was less expensive and more efficient to build Ms. Christian a new house in the same exact location.

Another program funded in part by a Community Development Block Grant will help low to moderate income individuals purchase their own home in Blacksburg. Community Housing Partners Corporation (CHPC) is a non profit organization working with the Town to help potential homeowners qualify for below-market



mortgage rates to purchase duplexes at Dickerson Estates. Dickerson Estates is a new low to moderate income development being constructed on the corner of Lee and Prospect Streets. Construction is expected to be complete by the summer of 2006. Applicants must qualify by income level, based on Department of Housing and Urban Development statistics. The Community Development Block Grant will provide \$3,000 in down payment assistance. If, for financial reasons, an applicant does not qualify to purchase one of the homes, CHPC will work with that person to increase their chances of qualifying in the future.

Hanratty explains that the cost of building materials has risen following Hurricane Katrina and both builders and buyers will feel that strain for some time. These costs will have an impact on the Town's housing initiatives but the Housing and Community Development Office will continue to assist the community in bridging the affordability gap. For Blacksburg residents and those who hope to make their home in Blacksburg, these opportunities are offering more than four walls and carpet; they're opening doors to the future and fulfilling many American Dreams.

Lucy Cook (NeighborWorks), Mayor Roger Hedgepeth, Janaka Casper (Community Housing Partners CEO), Matt Hanratty (Housing and Community Development Office), Dave Dehart (First National Bank), Colin Arnold (Architect), Nola Elliott (Housing Advisory Board President), Dr. Theodore Koebel (CHPC Board of Directors, Chair), W. Patrick Council (CHBC Board of Directors)



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About Town Says It All

Heather Browning
Community Relations Manager

What does the *About Town* mean to you? Depending on who you ask, the answer is different. From the perspective of the Community Relations Office, *About Town* offers a venue of outreach like that of none other. It is our primary piece of written communication, an olive branch, if you will, to the citizens that make Blacksburg the vibrant Town that it is. As a citizen, you may appreciate the friendly reminders of current events, important deadlines and the like. Maybe it's the insightful highlights of Town initiatives, and snippets of information that are of particular interest to you, your family, and your neighbors.

A few years ago Blacksburg was honored with a 3CMA (City-County-Communications and Marketing Association) National Award of Excellence for the *About Town*. Today, we look back on the years and comments from our readers and ask the fundamental question, what can we do better? As someone once said, if you're not improving, you're getting worse, and that's a sentiment we take very seriously at the Town. So, here we are on the verge of a new year, and we're happy to unveil the new and improved *About Town*.

What you'll notice in this issue of *About Town* is a new look and a careful realignment of news and information that we've found to be most pertinent to our readers. *About Town* has evolved in look and feel over the years, primarily because of budget crunches that have sometimes required us to shift the priority of our spending to other areas. We are fortunate at this time, through careful consideration and planning, to be able to reinvigorate the award winning *About Town* with a little color and the same attention to detail that you've come to rely on. We do this by modifying our publishing schedule slightly to three times a year instead of four. We are also able to accomplish this visual change by placing greater emphasis on giving you a more in depth look at the issues we face as a town, the initiatives we are eagerly undertaking, and the great role you play in the success of these efforts.

Remember, the *About Town* is also available online. Often times, you will find additional information and articles that do not appear in the printed version due to space and time restraints. Be sure to check it out at www.blacksburg.gov.

Time for a Cattle Call

Several times each year the Blacksburg Police Department receives calls about livestock milling about, in or near the roadway, as a result of open gates or broken fences. Often, collisions have been reported.

If you own livestock, or rent land to someone who does, please contact the Police Department to update the Livestock Owner Contact Listing. It's important for animal and public safety that the Police Department has current names and phone numbers for livestock owners to allow for swift notification and the prevention of injuries and property damage.

For more information contact the Blacksburg Police Department any time at (540) 961-1150.



not to be missed next month

JANUARY 1

Community Center and
Kipps Gym Closed

JANUARY 2

Town Offices Closed
No Trash Collection
in the Southeast
Community Center and
Kipps Gym Closed

JANUARY 2-13

Christmas Tree Collection

JANUARY 3

Town Council Work Session,
11:00 am
Planning Commission Meeting,
7:30 pm
Brush Collection Begins
in the Northeast

JANUARY 4

Trash Collection in the Southeast

JANUARY 9

Brush Collection Begins in the
Northwest

JANUARY 10

Town Council Meeting, 7:30 pm

JANUARY 13

Town Offices Closed for
Lee-Jackson Day
Regular Trash Collection

JANUARY 16

Town Offices Closed for
Martin Luther King Day
Regular Trash Collection

JANUARY 17

Town Council Work Session,
11:00 am
Brush Collection Begins
in the Southwest

JANUARY 23

Brush Collection Begins
in the Southeast

JANUARY 24

Town Council Meeting, 7:30 pm

JANUARY 26

Parks and Recreation Winter/
Spring Program Registration

JANUARY 31

Town Council Quarterly Work
Session, 3:00 pm.